

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON

TEXT: SONG OF SOLOMON 1:1-17

Introduction:

1. The Song of Solomon is also called “Canticles” (from the Latin Vulgate).
2. It is one of the shortest books in the Bible, consisting of only 117 verses. It is a difficult book to interpret, but like every book in the Bible, the key is the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. “Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly” – Charles Wesley.
4. Referring to the Song of Solomon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “We see our Saviour’s face in almost every page of the Bible, but here we see His heart and feel His love to us... We cannot appreciate the spirituality of this book unless God’s Spirit shall help us” (*The Most Holy Place*).
5. Hudson Taylor, English missionary to China, and founder of the China Inland Mission wrote, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable, and hence no part is, or can be, neglected without loss. Few portions of the Word will help the devout student more in the pursuit of this all-important knowledge of God than the much-neglected Song of Solomon” (*Union and Communion*).
6. The Song of Solomon is much neglected and is generally considered the most difficult and mysterious book in the Bible. Franz Delitzsch called it “the most obscure book in the Bible” (*Commentary on the Old Testament*). Matthew Henry called it a “parable.”
7. “It may be said to be the enigma of the Old Testament, as the Apocalypse is of the New” (*Barnes Notes*).
8. “Nowhere in Scripture does the unspiritual mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book, while the saintliest men and women of the ages have found it a source of pure and exquisite delight” (*Scofield Study Bible*).

I. DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET

1. The Song of Solomon is also considered by many to be the most controversial book in the Bible. The Jews did not allow a young man to read the Song of Solomon until he was at least thirty years old.
2. Controversy does not center over its inspiration (it has been included in the Jewish Bible from very early times), but rather over its interpretation. Unregenerate scholars have

attacked the book as “erotic,” “sensual” and even “immoral.”

3. “That the love of the divine Bridegroom should follow all the analogies of the marriage relation seems evil only to minds so ascetic that marital desire itself seems to them unholy” (*Scofield Study Bible*).
4. Spurgeon rightly noted that the Song of Solomon “has no charm in it for the unspiritual ears” (*The Most Holy Place*).
5. Matthew Poole said, “The truth is, this book requires a sober and pious, not a lascivious and foolish reader” (*A Commentary on the Holy Bible*).
6. “This is no soap opera. It is not a cheap play in which the hero is a neurotic, the heroine is erotic, and the plot is tommyrotic. Rather, it is a beautiful song of marital love” (J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*).
7. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, “The interpretation is twofold: Primarily, the book is the expression of pure marital love as ordained of God in creation, and the vindication of that love as against both asceticism and lust – the two profanations of the holiness of marriage. The secondary and larger interpretation is of Christ, the Son and His heavenly bride, the Church” (cf. II Cor. 11:1-4).
8. The Song of Solomon symbolizes the relationship between Jehovah as the Bridegroom, and Israel as His bride.
 - “For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called” (Isaiah 54:5).
 - “For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (Isaiah 62:5).
 - “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you” (Jeremiah 3:14).
 - “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies” (Hosea 2:19).
9. Furthermore, the Shulamite woman represents the individual believer devoted to her Shepherd. “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Solomon 2:16a).
10. In the Bible, wedded love is pictured as the joyful, affectionate, intimate, and exclusive union between Christ and His church. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

- That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).
11. HA Ironside said, “Therefore we may think of the book from four standpoints. Looking at it literally, we see the glorification of wedded love. Looking at it from a dispensational standpoint, we see the relationship between Jehovah and Israel. Redemptively, we find the wonderful relationship between Christ and the Church. And studying it from the moral or spiritual standpoint, we see it as an individual soul and the blessed, glorious, risen Lord” (*Addresses on the Song of Solomon*).
 12. In these wicked days of loose living, adultery, pornography, divorce, homosexuality, etc., it is important to note that one book in the Bible is dedicated to the beauty and purity of marital love.
 13. God ordained marriage back in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:20-25). Interestingly, the word “garden” is found six times in the Song of Solomon. “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (4:16b). The Song of Solomon is a beautiful love song picturing the joy and happiness of love, courtship, and marriage.
 14. “If, as seems justified by the text, we take the Song of Solomon as the words of a couple anticipating an imminent wedding, the book serves as a useful corrective to unbiblical marital asceticism. It shows that God intended married couples to enjoy a wide range of sexual pleasure when it expresses the love between them...It certainly shows the spiritual nature, dignity, and sanctity of love within marriage” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*).

II. DIFFERENT WAYS TO INTERPRET THE SONG OF SOLOMON

1. THE ALLEGORICAL THEORY

- A. The Bible does contain allegory, but an allegorical interpretation must not ignore or disregard the literal interpretation (cf. Gal. 4:24).
- B. Many of the rabbis interpreted the Song of Solomon as a non-historical story with fictional characters, designed to teach spiritual lessons about God’s great love for Israel. Many early Christians adopted this theory, but changed it to Christ’s love for His church.
- C. Denying the literal story behind the Song of Solomon is the wrong way to interpret Scripture.

2. THE TYPICAL INTERPRETATION

- A. Typical interpretation differs from allegorical interpretation because it does not disregard the literal meaning of the Biblical text. By “type” we mean “a person, thing, or event in the Old Testament, designed to represent or prefigure some person, thing, or event in the New Testament” (Fred Hartley Wight, *Devotional Studies of Old Testament Types*).
- B. “Types are pictures, object lessons, by which God taught His people concerning His grace and saving power” (WG Moorehead, *The International Bible Encyclopedia*).
- C. “The typology of the Old Testament is the very alphabet of the language in which the doctrine of the New Testament is written” (Sir Robert Anderson, *The Literal Interpretation of Scripture*).
- D. The typical interpretation recognizes that the book is factual, but sees the spiritual meaning behind the story. “A type is an Old Testament institution, event, person, object, or ceremony which has reality and purpose in Biblical history, but which also by divine design foreshadows something yet to be revealed” (Donald K. Campbell, “The Interpretation of Types,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 112, No. 447).
- E. For example, our Lord said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). The serpent of brass was a type of Christ lifted up on the cross, but this does not alter the historical details (Numbers 21:5-9).
- F. W Graham Scroggie wrote, “Our view is that here, as in JONAH, we have allegory emerging from history. As to the *history*, we take the view, influentially held, that in the Song there are not two, but three, chief characters, Solomon, Shulamith, and a shepherd lover” (*Know Your Bible*, Vol. 1).
- G. “The story contains in every chapter, every verse, every line a deep spiritual message. Those who dislike typology and symbolism will never feel at home in the Song of Solomon for here are hidden some of ‘the deep things of God’” (John Phillips, *Exploring the Song of Solomon*).
- H. Franz Delitzsch writes, “The fact is, that by a violation of the law of God (Deut. 17:17), Solomon brings a cloud over the typical representation, which is not at all to be thought of in connection with the Antitype... In Christ, on the contrary, is no imperfection; sin remains in the congregation. In the Song, the bride is purer than the bridegroom; but in the fulfilling of the

Song this relation is reversed: the bridegroom is purer than the bride” (*Commentary on the Old Testament*).

- I. Of course, there is no “cloud over the typical representation” if the Shulamite’s beloved is not King Solomon, but the shepherd.

III. THE SONG OF SONGS

1. First Kings 4:32 tells us that Solomon wrote 1,005 songs. But this he calls, “the song of songs” (1:1), that is, the best of all his songs, the most exquisite song. Similar superlatives are found elsewhere in Scripture.
 - “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords” (Deuteronomy 10:17).
 - “The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods” (Daniel 2:47).
 - The Lord Jesus Christ is “the Prince of princes” (Daniel 8:25) and “King of kings and Lord of lords” (I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).
 - Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings” (Daniel 2:37).
 - In the temple there was the “holy of holies” (cf. Exodus 26:33; 29:37).
 - King Solomon said, “But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?” (II Chronicles 2:6).
 - Solomon begins the book of Ecclesiastes by saying, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (1:2; cf. 12:8).
 - Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5).
2. And among all the songs in the Bible, the Song of Solomon is “the song of songs,” i.e., the most beautiful or the most excellent song.

3. Delitzsch said, “whilst all other songs of Solomon have disappeared, the providence of God has preserved this one, the crown of them all” (*Commentary*).
4. Discerning students of God’s Word have noted the interesting contrast between the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. “In Ecclesiastes, man finds his soul too great for this world to feed and fill; all is vanity; there is no profit under the sun. In Canticles, man, looking above the sun, finds in God what not only fills his soul, but cannot be contained. The sea fills the cup, but the cup does not hold the sea. And so from VANITY we come to VERITY” (AT Pierson, *Keys to the Word*).
5. The Song of Solomon is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Interestingly, God is not mentioned anywhere in the Song of Solomon. The Song of Songs is not directly quoted in the New Testament but there are some apparent allusions.
6. The Song of Solomon is an enigmatic book. The Song of Solomon is enigmatic, because King Solomon (like Samson, Balaam, King Saul, and other notable characters in the Bible) himself was enigmatic.
7. Consider his great wisdom. According to I Kings 4:30-34, “Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all nations round about...And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.”
8. King Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, and as a type of Christ, Solomon’s kingdom was prosperous and peaceful.
 - “And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (II Chronicles 9:22).
 - “And he had peace on all sides round about him” (I Kings 4:24b).
9. As a young man, King Solomon had a heart for God. “And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father” (I Kings 3:3a).

10. However, Solomon brazenly disobeyed God and married many heathen wives. He became an idolater as well as a polygamist. “But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites: Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart” (I Kings 11:1-3).
11. “And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin” (Nehemiah 13:25, 26).
12. Students of God’s Word have wondered if King Solomon ever repented. The Bible does not say that he did not repent. It is this author’s belief that King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes when he was older, and that he did repent. However, the Bible does not clearly state this.

CONCLUSION:

1. Next week, Lord willing, we will look at the principal characters, the symbolism behind the characters, and the role of the tempter.
2. Many interpreters of the Song of Solomon see only two main characters – Solomon and the Shulamite woman. However, it appears that there are actually three principal characters, as well as several subsidiary characters.
3. The three main characters are Solomon, the Shulamite woman, and a shepherd (cf. 1:7; 2:7).

4. The shepherd is referred to as “my beloved” (1:13, 14, 16, etc.). King Solomon is the shepherd’s rival, and even though Solomon has far more to offer materially and financially, the Shulamite woman prefers the shepherd and remains true to him (cf. 1:4; 2:16; etc.).
5. Other characters in the poem are the daughters of Jerusalem (who function as a background chorus), certain citizens of Jerusalem, the brothers of the Shulamite woman (“my mother’s children” – 1:6), and certain companions of the shepherd.